

A MONTHLY LETTER ABOUT EVANGELISM

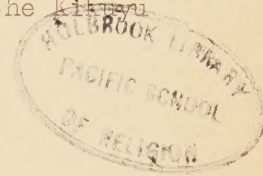
LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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Mr. John Wood, the author of this letter, is a layman and planter at Limuru in Kenya. He has been considerably concerned about the question of evangelism among the Kikuyus and it has been his initiative that has led to a rather remarkable development of joint YMCA/YWCAs in the Kikuyu villages.

EVANGELISM AMONGST THE KIKUYU



1. The Revival Christians and the Mau Mau Emergency

The Mau Mau Emergency focussed the attention of the world on Kenya and upon the Kikuyu tribe. In January this year the emergency laws were repealed and the sorrows and anguish of the last seven years are being forgotten in the new sense of freedom which permeates through all levels of the tribe, now about 1.200.000 people. The declaration of a state of emergency came seven years ago with the murder by Kikuyu thugs of a loyal Christian Kikuyu Chief.

This was followed by the murder of a very large number of Kikuyu Christians and others loyal to Government, and the occasional murder of an Asian trader or European farmer. The pressure exerted by mau mau upon the whole tribe, and in particular upon the Kikuyu Church was relentless.

In the earlier days the murder of prominent Kikuyu Christians was of constant occurrence. Congregations were intimidated by warnings of a terrifying nature - on one occasion by the sacrifice of a goat on the altar of a Kikuyu Church whose congregation was too defiant of mau mau. Official estimates were that 90 % or more of the people were active or passive adherents of mau mau. To the detached observer there was a mysterious domination of an entire people by a spirit of evil working in the darkness of fear.

In this darkness the only light was the remarkable spiritual strength of the Revival movement which, starting twenty years ago in Ruanda had worked its way down through Uganda and became a powerful force for conversion amongst the Kikuyu as the war ended. The Revival Christians were unshakeable. They held the flagging church together during the dark days, and many of them were martyred by the mau mau.



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2. Reaction to social change : toward a better understanding of the Mau Mau.

The Kikuyu people are amongst the most intelligent of East Africa. Although fifty years ago they were described as "a stone age people" their capacity to absorb western civilisation has been remarkable. Today there are among them doctors, lawyers, engineers, agriculturalists and philosophers with European and American university degrees. The bulk of the population remains, however, conservative and indolent - envious of the material things of civilisation, but incapable of absorbing the necessary knowledge and of applying the necessary energy to achieve these fruits.

The Church is little older than the oldest ordained minister. Western civilisation, and the presence of substantial numbers of European and Asian settlers, concerned with agriculture, industry and commerce, and the remarkably successful achievements of these immigrants has brought many tensions to the Kikuyu. It is probable that the root of mau mau was an instinctive revolt against the pressure of being drawn forward out of security of tribal status into a modern competitive open society. Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned is that once such a people are on the march to maturity their forward progress, however impetuous and erratic, must not be impeded, but guided forward with the utmost sensitivity and Christian love.

3. Christian Gospel, Western Civilization and Racial Antagonism.

In relation to the Kikuyu, therefore, the Church has a task of evangelism of the utmost importance and of great complexity. Divisions and tensions are everywhere apparent, within the Church and without. Western peoples brought Christianity, and in consequence simple Africans are disillusioned when they conclude that few westerners are practising Christians.

Racial antagonisms then become confused with Christianity, and Christianity becomes a "European" religion, either to be rejected by conservative pagans or adopted as a veneer by those who wish to acquire respectable status in the competitive world. Membership of the Church becomes for many a social advantage, and perhaps a means to more lucrative employment.

Within the Church there are tensions - between rich and poor, old and young, white and black. The different denominations are, of course, completely non-racial, and in the higher councils of the churches, where Africans usually predominate numerically there is a wonderfully sensitive fellowship and perception of Christian unity.

4. From Overseas Missions to Indigenous Churches.

During the last fifty years the pattern of church development has been for overseas Missionary Societies, mainly the Church Missionary Society and the Church of Scotland Mission (and the Africa Inland Mission), to build an indigenous church on denominational lines in African populated areas, whilst European settler congregations of the same denominations tended to build up their own churches.

With the increase in number of educated Africans, on one hand, and the growing conviction on the part of Missionary Societies that they should leave the indigenous church to stand on its own feet, on the other, the non-racial nature of the churches has become more apparent. In areas of intensive European settlement true Parishes comprising European and African Ordained Ministers serving all people, both African and European, in a given area are becoming the pattern. The Missionary Societies then turn to special services and projects - of which perhaps the most useful is a "Christian Industrial Training Centre" run by the C.M.S. and "Community Centres" in Nairobi run by a number of church groups.

One of the most important fields of need is amongst young people. Half the total population of the Kikuyu people is rated as "juvenile". This means an impossible burden on the machinery of education and employment. The attempt to provide some form of primary education for every child is approaching achievement, which means that a mass of partly educated young people are turned loose in a world to which they have been introduced in imagination, but in which they are not properly equipped to compete.

5. Evangelism : Yesterday and Today.

Evangelism is concerned with all these fields. If the foundation attitude of the evangelistic Christian is, as Charles de Foucauld expresses it - "Being present amongst people with a presence willed and intended as a witness to the love of Christ", the Kikuyu people have now largely passed out of the early stages of evangelism by Missionary Societies who provide schools and hospitals, and European missionaries to preach and teach.

Now responsibility for evangelism rests with increasing clarity upon all, whatever their calling, or race, or circumstances of life may be, who profess and call themselves Christian. The young Kikuyu who has grown up during the emergency has found that the tribal life of his ancestors is not attractive. He is in conflict with his elders and out of touch with his fellows. His education has given him a glimpse of a paradise of material benefits to which he can rarely hope to attain. African economic enterprises can offer him little hope of employment, so he turns to the western economy, and feels frustrated when he finds that even this high pressure world cannot absorb more than a small part of those seeking work.

In the earlier days of the emergency a serious attempt was made to build a Christian missionary Youth Movement amongst these young people. The Revival Movement had attracted and converted a number of young men and women. The start of governmental policy of "villagisation" of all Kikuyu at the beginning of 1955 created the opportunity of building Christian Associations in the villages. The work began in the Anglican Church, but on consideration it was evident that "Christian Movement" of young Africans should not be limited to any one denomination. The young people readily accepted the concept of a Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association with an inter-denominational Full Membership of those who were committed to the service of the Lord Jesus, and an Associate Membership of those who were interested but not committed.

With an attractive badge, and a fund of ideas, each group became a nucleus of evangelism in its immediate vicinity. Group "concerts" and choirs became very popular, and were in themselves an effective means of evangelising pagans and marginal Christians. A typical "concert" would attract perhaps a thousand villagers, and would portray, using local "props", the outstanding stories of the Bible - Dives and Lazarus, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan. In this way the group of young people had a lot of fun, gave others a lot of fun, and left the essence of Christ's message in the minds of people who would never think of going to church to listen to a dull sermon.

6. Evangelism : Preparation and Prospect for Tomorrow.

Lack of funds has made it virtually impossible to give material help to those in need, and development of this form of evangelism has been limited to leadership training and conferences. At a recent "Instructional Conference" for example, some thirty young men and women were given a course of lectures which attempted to analyse youth problems and suggest remedies within the resources of the local church.

From the resulting discussion a "Handbook" was prepared, divided for convenience into twelve lessons. With it any group, ordained minister or lay worker, has ready on hand a simple and practical method of starting and developing Christian youth groups, with many educational and recreational activities, and suggestions of means for giving Christian service to others.

The spirit of the young Kikuyu Christian of today is exemplified by a young High School boy, just approaching his School Certificate term, who formed a group of about sixty of his school mates, no less than two fifths of the school. He gave them a course of the twelve lessons, and sent them off the following holidays filled with missionary zeal to start Christian Associations in their home villages !!

The greatest need of the young Kikuyu, yearning for education, and coming rapidly into his place in modern technical civilisation is to perceive the relevance of the gospel in all the day to day matters of life, and to perceive the spiritual foundations upon which western civilisation stands. The root problem of modern evangelism is to interpret Our Lord's teaching - "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you".

